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Congressman Henry A. Waxman Statement on Introduction of "Ban Asbestos in America Act of 2003"

I am very pleased to introduce the "Ban Asbestos in America Act of 2003" in the House of Representatives. This is the companion bill to a bill that Senator Murray is reintroducing today in the Senate. Senator Murray has been a real leader in addressing the harm that Americans continue to suffer from exposure to asbestos. I thank her for her hard work on this serious problem.

We all know that asbestos can be deadly. It is a notorious carcinogen and causes other devastating diseases and disability. But what most Americans don't know is that this dangerous substance is still added, *on purpose*, to numerous products sold in this country. In 2001, companies in the United States used *13,000 metric tons* of asbestos.

Sometimes it seems that people trust their government too much. Many Americans reasonably assume that since asbestos is harmful and unnecessary, and since Congress and EPA have taken action on asbestos, it must be illegal to add it to products. They assume that new products are safe in terms of risks from asbestos. In fact, EPA tried to ban asbestos years ago, but was sued and lost on some technical grounds.

The result is that people don't even know that some new products contain asbestos. And people don't realize that they still need to protect themselves against asbestos from these products. For example, many mechanics don't realize that asbestos is used in many brakes, exposing them and the public to dangerous asbestos dust. Asbestos is also still used in many roofing products and in gaskets. Continued exposure from new products is entirely avoidable – and this bill would fix the problem.

The "Ban Asbestos in America Act" also addresses other urgent needs related to harm from asbestos. It requires EPA, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the Department of Labor to establish a national public education program about the dangers posed by products with asbestos. For example, many homes in the United States contain vermiculite insulation in their attics – but most homeowners don't know that this vermiculite is often contaminated with asbestos. Homeowners and workers need to be made aware of the risk. People must be informed that they should not disturb this

insulation. Yesterday EPA issued a brochure, but we need to do more to get the word out on this and other risks.

This bill also establishes a national registry for mesothelioma, a usually fatal form of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. The registry will help scientists to better track and treat this terrible illness. The bill also authorizes funding for mesothelioma research and treatment.

We have not yet finished our job of protecting Americans from exposure to asbestos. We need a ban and public education about the risks that will remain. I'm introducing this bill to get the job done and make this country a safer place for people to work and live.